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Atari Online News, Etc.
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~ Web Piracy Resilient! ~ People Are Talking! ~ CIA Web Site Is Down!
~ Oklahoma Wants Sin Tax ~ Google Wallet Unsafe! ~ Iran Blocks Internet!
~ Google 'Drive' Coming! ~ Google Privacy Issues ~ New iPad Announcement?

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    - * Widespread Censorship Protest *-
    - * Blocking New Google Privacy Changes *-
- * European Internet Campaigners Battle ACTA! *-

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"Saying it like it is!"

It's been another long week here, and I'm bushed! A lot going on these days, and not enough energy to think about them and report 'em here. The GOP race has seen another shake-up, but I think it's just a bump in the road for Romney. Then again, we all know anything is possible in politics. I said possible, not probable!

We may get - I said, may get - more than an inch of snow this weekend! Yes, it's possible that we'll get the biggest snow "storm" of the year, at least to-date this winter! Well, I'll take a wait-and-see attitude, but I'm not going to get overly shaken by this one! It's been a great winter season so far - no snow on the ground at present. This is something quite rare for this area, but you won't hear any complaints from my corner!

So, let's move forward, not worry about politics or the weather, and just get to this week's issue!

Until next time...

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Oklahoma The Latest To Pin Problems on Video Games!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

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Oklahoma The Latest State To Pin Problems on Video Games, Proposes Sin Tax

An Oklahoma legislator is proposing a what about the children? bill (HB 2696) that aims to tax violent video games. Former schoolteacher and current Democratic member of the Oklahoma House of Representatives, William T. Fourkiller, wants to levy an excise tax rate of one percent on the sale of violent video games; because these games supposedly spawn the obese bullies which plague our society.

"Violent video games contribute to some of our societal problems like obesity and bullying, but because they raise a lot of revenue, they can also provide part of the solution," Fourkiller told Oklahoma City's KFOR.

A sense of urgency surrounds HB 2696 as it has been pushed under the emergency heading; Fourkiller says it's necessary for the "preservation of the public peace, health and safety." The tax's goals seem to be genuine, and not simply intended to fatten the government wallet. The money gained from HB 2696 will go directly to curing Oklahoma children of the socially undesirable gaming sins which the bill is attacking; half of the money will go towards the Bullying Prevention Revolving Fund, and the other half will go towards the Childhood Outdoor Education Fund.

"A gentleman shot a police officer and stole his car," Fourkiller points out. "He had been playing Grand Theft Auto."

A glaring problem with the bill is that it seems to be geared towards a vague swath of video games in its definition: "Violent video game means a video or computer game that has received a rating from the Entertainment Software Rating Board of Teen, Mature or Adult Only." That means, aside from obvious games like Fallout, Bully, Grand Theft Auto and Call of Duty, the bill would be taxing games like Beatles Rock Band, You Don't Know Jack and The Sims 3; though according to the KFOR piece, Fourkiller says he isn't targeting the video game industry.

As far as obesity goes, sedentary TV screen time as a whole has, in the past, been painted as the main culprit for spawning overweight children. However, Reason points to a recent Michigan State study which found that race, age and socioeconomic status were stronger indicators of a child's future BMI, rather than cellphones, gaming or the Internet.

Fourkiller may also have an outdated idea of gamer demographics, as the ESA published a study which determined the average gamers' age to be 37, with 29% of all gamers over 50 and only 18% of gamers under the age of 18. So, if Oklahoma's gamer demographic mirrors the ESA study, this proposed sin tax could end up affecting many adults who enjoy their sinful games.

If the bill doesn't get a majority in the Oklahoma House and Senate, it will go to the public to vote on in November. Though 1% of a \$50 game is only 50 cents and may not seem much, the fear is that this bill could be laying the groundwork for larger anti-gaming movements. It's definitely not the first time these sentiments have surfaced in legislation: Texas in 2006, Jon Erpenbach from Wisconsin in 2007, New Mexico's "No Child Left Inside" movement in 2008. Of course, none of these propositions seemed to make it far, and as we've seen with the California violent video games case in July, going after games for their content can be unconstitutional as it infringes on First Amendment rights. The Supreme Court's ruling in California addresses much of Fourkiller's argument: Violence isn't the sole realm of video games; violent video games aren't necessarily connected to aggression; interactivity, or "taking on a role" as Fourkiller puts it, invites commentary and perspective, not brainwashing; and ultimately, esthetic choices about art and literature

aren't the government's decision. But what do you think? Is this recent anti-video game legislation an example of a sentiment gaining traction? Is this an issue that even concerns the government? Or should it be up to parents alone to police gaming habits?

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

European Internet Campaigners Battle ACTA

A controversial international accord billed as a way to beat online piracy has sparked a fightback led by Internet users in ex-communist countries who say the region's past underlines the need to defend freedom.

An international day of rallies against the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) has been scheduled for Saturday.

For weeks, the hub of discontent has been Poland, whose centre-right government last week pledged to freeze the ratification process after a storm of protest.

Observers underline that the issue strikes a chord like few others since the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989.

"I haven't seen such major demonstrations in Poland for 20 years," Warsaw sociologist Adam Ostolski told AFP.

Since late January, thousands of mostly young Poles have taken to the streets nationwide brandishing anti-ACTA and anti-censorship banners.

They have sported the iconic mask of global "hacktivist" group Anonymous, which along with similar organisations has claimed lesson-teaching attacks on official websites.

The real and virtual campaigns, mustered on online social networks, kicked off ahead of the January 26 signature in Tokyo of ACTA by Poland and 21 other European governments.

Poland's decision to freeze ratification has been echoed by its neighbours the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

"Hacktivists" have also launched cyber attacks on the Czech government and Prime Minister Petr Necas's ODS party.

ACTA was negotiated between the 27-nation European Union, Australia, Canada, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Switzerland and the United States.

It aims to bolster international standards for intellectual property protection, for example by doing more to fight counterfeit medicine and

other goods.

But its attempt to attack illegal downloading and Internet file-sharing has sparked the most controversy, amid fears that it could curtail online freedom.

The debate has been similar to that sparked in the United States over two draft laws, the Protect Intellectual Property Act and Stop Online Piracy Act - better known by their acronyms PIPA and SOPA - which led to blacked-out page protests by Wikipedia and other websites.

Governments have come under fire for signing ACTA - which still needs parliamentary ratification in most countries to come into force - after talks with record companies and commercial media but not with groups representing Internet users.

Critics say it gives copyright-holders too much clout, for example allowing them to force the closure of websites without the same level of proof as a court would demand.

"Poles are among the most active nations on the Internet and on social networks in Europe," underlined Ostolski.

"For young people who lack much chance of climbing the social ladder, the Internet is one of the last public arenas where they feel free. And then along comes ACTA, and we start controlling that arena. For them, it's a question of freedom, dignity and access to a culture," he added.

History also counts, said Mikulas Ferjencik, deputy leader of the Czech Republic's Pirate Party, based on the Swedish cyber-freedom movement of the same name.

Ferjencik has dubbed ACTA a "serious attack on civil liberties".

"I think people in Eastern Europe started file-sharing much earlier, well before the big corporations even tried to impose a monopoly," he told AFP.

"Then there are other factors, such as our greater experience with censorship and a lack of trust in the state," he added.

In Bulgaria, meanwhile, the noacta-bg.info website claims that "ACTA's aim is to combat copyright infringement on the Internet but in reality it will result in censorship on the last truly free space."

In Western Europe, the anti-ACTA mood has taken longer to spread, making Saturday's rallies a litmus test.

Protests are planned in 54 German cities, as well as in Britain, France and Italy.

Europeans Plan Widespread Protests Against Internet Censorship

Protests against Internet censorship will blanket Europe this weekend, while Germany and Latvia announced Friday they would put the brakes on signing a copyright treaty that has sparked controversy across the continent.

More than 200,000 people have committed to attending rallies in 200 cities to protest the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement, or "ACTA."

"The map of planned protests is just breathtaking," said Holmes Wilson, co-founder of anti-ACTA group Fight for the Future. "You've got tens of thousands of people taking to the streets in small cities, in countries where large street protests are not common."

Proponents of ACTA say that the treaty will help fight global copyright theft. Opponents, fresh off the SOPA and PIPA battlefields, argue that ACTA will harm free speech on the Internet. They also accuse the treaty's architects of holding negotiations away from the public eye.

"This is truly the Internet's Arab Spring," said Fight for the Future co-founder Tiffiniy Cheng. "People are rising up against anti-democratic laws that stifle individual freedoms. And they're organizing spontaneously, without leaders, using tools available to everyone."

Public opposition to the treaty has already struck Europe. Last month, thousands of people in Poland took to the streets in protest while the European rapporteur for ACTA resigned after calling the negotiation process a "charade."

It appears some European leaders have been listening to ACTA's naysayers. Germany and Latvia's decision to delay signing ACTA puts them in league with Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, who have also halted the process.

A German foreign ministry spokesperson said that the country needed "time to carry out further discussions" about the treaty, the "target="_blank">BBC reported.

ACTA was signed by the U.S. and Japan in 2006. Australia, Canada, Morocco, New Zealand, Singapore and South Korea signed on last year and the European Union signed last month, but no country's legislature has yet ratified the treaty. ACTA will go into force when ratified by at least six countries.

Would you hit the streets to protest ACTA? Is ACTA just as bad as SOPA and PIPA? Let us know in the comments below.

Developments Related to Google Privacy Initiative

Some developments related to Google Inc.'s new privacy initiative:

Jan. 24: Google announces a plan to link user data across its email, video, social-networking and other services. The company says the move will simplify its privacy policy, improve the user experience and help advertisers find customers more easily, especially on mobile devices. Critics raise privacy concerns. The plan is to take effect March 1.

Feb. 1: Rival Microsoft Corp. runs full-page newspaper ads slamming Google and its new policy. Microsoft uses the opportunity to tout its own Web-based alternatives, saying for instance that users of its free email service, Hotmail, don't have to worry about the content of their emails being used to help target ads.

Feb. 3: The European Union's data protection authorities release a letter

to Google asking the company to delay the new policy until they have verified that it doesn't break the bloc's data protection laws. Google says it had briefed data protection agencies beforehand and had heard no substantial concerns then.

Wednesday: A consumer watchdog group sues the Federal Trade Commission in an attempt to prevent Google from making its planned changes. The Electronic Privacy Information Center contends Google's new policies would violate restrictions imposed in an agreement reached with the FTC last year.

Lawsuit Seeks To Block Google's Privacy Changes

A consumer watchdog group is suing the Federal Trade Commission in an attempt to prevent Google from making sweeping changes to its privacy policies next month.

The planned revisions would enable Google Inc. to bundle the personal information gathered by its Internet search engine and other services, such as Gmail, YouTube and Plus, so the company can gain a better understanding of its users and potentially sell more advertising. Google has depicted the switch as an improvement that will make its privacy policies easier to understand and help deliver more helpful information to users.

But the Electronic Privacy Information Center contends Google's new policies would violate restrictions imposed in an agreement reached with the FTC last year. Google submitted to the rules to resolve complaints that the company had improperly exposed users' email contacts in a now-defunct service called Buzz.

A lawsuit filed Wednesday by EPIC maintains the agreement gives FTC the power to stop Google from making the planned privacy change. The complaint also is seeking an order from a Washington federal court to block Google's policy changes from taking effect March 1.

Among other things, EPIC alleges Google's new privacy guidelines require users' consent. The group also alleges Google hasn't thoroughly explained the motives for the changes, making it an "unfair and deceptive business practice."

In a statement, Google said it has gone to great lengths to explain the changes to users since announcing the planned switch two weeks ago. The Mountain View, Calif., company previously has said it explained the privacy revisions to the FTC.

"We take privacy very seriously," Google said. "We're happy to engage in constructive conversations about our updated privacy policy, but EPIC is wrong on the facts and the law."

FTC spokeswoman Claudia Bourne Farrell said agency "takes compliance with our consent orders very seriously and always looks carefully at any evidence that they are being violated."

The Central Intelligence Agency's website CIA.gov is unresponsive in what looks a lot like a denial of service attack, but it's a bit too early to blame it on Anonymous, which usually likes to loudly take credit for these kinds of things. Of the key Twitter accounts that usually tout successful hacks by the loose-knit hacking network, none directly took credit for the website take-down. Youranonnews, which is the closest thing the group has to an official account, tweeted the news, but cited Russia Today's story about the attack. It didn't claim credit. Another reliable Anonymous news feed, AnonymousIRC, hasn't mentioned the CIA.gov attack. Only the account @AnonymousPress, which Russia Today cited, appeared to take credit, and that wasn't very explicit: "http://cia.gov DOWN | #UMAD? | #Anonymous."

But if it is the work of Anonymous or some allied hacker, it wouldn't be the first time they've targeted the CIA. Back in June, the Anonymous splinter group LulzSec took credit for bringing down the site, "for the lulz." If this is a repeat of that, they're being a lot quieter about it, which isn't Anonymous's normal M.O. on what it's dubbed FuckFBIFriday. One well-known Anonymous hacker, who goes by the handle Sabu, reportedly led LulzSec over the spring and summer and still tends to broadcast Anonymous's claimed victories. His account mentions nothing so far of the CIA hack.

Iran Blocks The Internet

The Iranian government has reportedly begun blocking access to the Internet. A post on Hacker News explains that since yesterday, it's been difficult to impossible to get online. "Since Thursday Iranian government has shutted [sic] down the HTTPS protocol which has caused almost all Google services (Gmail, and Google.com itself) to become inaccessible," Sara70 writes. "Almost all websites that rely on Google APIs (like Wolfram Alpha) won't work."

This month marks the anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution (a celebration which continues through March), and the Iranian government is allegedly attempting to contain potential demonstrations by quieting citizens' connection to the rest of the world.

Websites using HTTPS are many: in addition to Google and its various Web products, they include Facebook, Hotmail, and Yahoo. An Iranian citizen who wished to remain anonymous told Cnet this morning that despite the widespread news, the government is denying these actions.

If the Iranian officials plan to cut off citizens during the entire holiday, that means Iran could be in the dark until next month. Iran operates its Internet much like China, meaning it has its own state run firewall. According to various reports, work-arounds typically used to circumvent this are not working.

Last year the Middle East fell into a similar Internet blackout when protestors' demonstrations began making the rounds via various social networking sites. Despite the heavy-handed censorship, the Arab Spring revolutions continued on and there were even spikes in activism as a result of the black outs.

Still, the Internet has proved a powerful tool not only in reaching the

outside world but in uniting forces on the inside. Facebook and Twitter have particularly been mouthpieces of the people during these recent rebellions. Although this should cause everyone to wonder how Twitter's new International censorship policy will work in practice.

In 2009, Iranian citizens used Twitter to organize what have become called the 'Twitter Revolutions.' The microblogging site even delayed scheduled maintenance so that it could remain up and running for the protestors. Relationships between US-based Web companies and Iran have remained tense since, and intense restrictions remain. However, any progress that's been made may be hurt by the nation's decision to restrict citizen access.

Study Finds Internet Piracy Resilient Despite MegaUpload Takedown

Traditional entertainment corporations and the U.S. government rejoiced as the Internet felt the hard-handed impact of MegaUpload's take-down. But a study released by DeepField Networks, titled "File Sharing in the Post MegaUpload Era," has offered compelling data proving that the effect on file sharing was only temporary, and that the celebration among copyright advocates was entirely premature.

MegaUpload formerly sat at the throne among file-sharing services and accounted for 30 percent to 40 percent of all file-sharing-related traffic at any given time. To give some idea of its massive scale, total Internet traffic dropped between 2 percent and 3 percent during the hour following the MegaUpload raid on January 18.

The drastic decline is attributed to DeepField's revelation that that merely six file-sharing service providers cater to the majority (80 percent) of total file-sharing traffic.

Megavideo accounted for 34.1 percent of total file sharing traffic on Jan. 18 before the raid. The second-largest file-sharing service, Filesonic (which has shuttered its file sharing functionalities following the raid), once accounted for a hefty 19.1-percent market share.

But as DeepField's data from Jan. 19 shows, traffic post-raid did not permanently hamper MegaUpload users. Rather, users redirected their loyalty to other existing services, thereby crowning Putlocker the new king.

The inconvenience as a user that comes out of Megavideo's shut down, due in part to a heavy dependence on the American server provider Carpathia Hosting, is rather minor. Now most file-sharing services' servers are relegated to more expensive hosting, and users may experience slightly slower download speeds, provided that they're downloading across continents. The greater issue arose when the U.S. government decided to deny temporary access to MegaUpload users' files, both legitimate and pirated.

With this in mind, it's possible that "too big, too quickly," contributed to MegaUpload's downfall. MegaUpload's subscription and advertising model supported a lavish lifestyle for CEO Kim Dotcom and other execs. Among the seized property from MegaUpload executives were a 2008 Rolls-Royce, 2010 Maserati, 1989 Lamborghini and 14 Mercedes-Benz vehicles, sporting vanity license plates that included, CEO, HACKER, GOOD, and GUILTY.

Despite the lucrative market for pirated content, and unfounded claims of piracy's purported negative effects on the entertainment industry's bottom line, copyright advocates have entirely underestimated the resiliency of users, and the gusto with which they bounced back.

For example, The Pirate Bay has moved toward magnet links, which allow users to access torrents without having to download a file. One Pirate Bay user scraped the service's 1,643,194 torrents into a mere uncompressed 164MB. In the event that The Pirate Bay disappears off of the face of the Internet, you could conceivably stash away a complete index of its pirated offerings on a thumb drive.

At the end of the day, MegaUpload is just one large head on the mythical Hydra beast of file-sharing networks. Chop one head off and two more regenerate to replace the fresh stump. Has the MegaUpload takedown tackled piracy? It has. Was it effective? Not really. The hive mind that is the Internet will get what it wants. DeepField's finding is just one example of why resisting is futile and unproductive, short of the Great Firewall. But even then, you can always bypass it using a virtual private network.

Apple Plans To Announce New iPad 3 at Beginning of March

This time round, there won't be an Apple event in February. Instead, it's early March when we'll get the full and official announcement about the upcoming iPad 3, apparently.

According to John Paczkowski at AllThingsD, 'sources close to the company' expect an Apple event of some kind in San Francisco very early in March.

There's no exact date yet on when the iPad 3 will be launched. After previous announcements, however, the new devices usually follow within just a matter of weeks.

As we reported a few weeks ago, the next generation iPad could potentially be quite a nice upgrade to the iPad 2. It's likely to be a similar size and shape, but could offer a higher-resolution 2048x1536 Retina display, a faster quad-core processor, improved graphics chip and perhaps a better camera.

Google Drive Cloud Storage Service Expected Soon

Google will soon launch a fully-featured cloud storage service called Google Drive, reports Amir Efrati at the Wall Street Journal. Drive would compete directly with other consumer-friendly cloud services, like DropBox, Box, and SugarSync, among others, and will allegedly be priced below that of other similar services.

Like DropBox and others, Drive will have its own dedicated apps for both PC and mobile devices, Efrati's sources say. Users will be able to upload any type of file, like text documents, music, or video files, from any Web-connected device, including smartphones and tablets. Also like many other cloud-storage services, Drive will also include a file-sharing feature, though it's not yet clear how that feature will function, especially given the recent heat surrounding Megaupload and its ilk.

Google already offers additional cloud storage space for Docs, Gmail, and Picasa at a cost of \$5 per year for 20GB extra, or \$20 per year for 80GB. And it seems likely that Drive will have both a free option, as well as expanded storage at a similarly low cost, which would price it far below comparable services. DropBox, for example, gives users 2GB for free, but charges about \$10 every month for 50GB of storage, or \$20 a month for 100GB. Box is more expensive, at a cost of \$10 a month for 25GB. And SugarSync, the least expensive of these three potential Drive competitors, still costs \$5 a month for 30GB.

The reason Google can offer storage for such a low cost is because it owns one of the world's largest and best-connected server infrastructures. Compare this to DropBox, which pays to lease server space from Amazon. (Amazon also offers its own consumer storage service, Cloud Drive, which offers 5GB free, and additional storage at a cost of \$1 a year per GB, starting at 20GB.) Since Google would only have to pay for the cost of running its servers, rather than pay a usage fee to another company, it can keep costs low for customers.

While Google may be able to beat DropBox and company on price, there's no guarantee that it will trump them on functionality. In fact, Google is notorious for releasing products that lack a polished feel. That said, Google is pushing hard to more tightly knit together its wide variety of services, and Drive will surely be woven into its quilt of digital offerings, giving it an instant user base. In short: DropBox should definitely be worried, but it's not yet time to hit the panic button.

Drive will reportedly launch in the coming weeks or months.

Google Wallet Now Just as Unsafe as a Regular Waller

After a week of hacks, Google's mobile payment system has lost more of its credibility as a safe payment option, making it just as vulnerable to money-theft as a regular-old billfold. When Google first announced Wallet, it emphasized all the security features, ensuring multiple layers of safety with its hyper-encrypted NFC technology. "A safer Wallet," proclaims the Wallet website. And when the security features all work, it actually was safer than credit cards.

But the latest hack pushes Google Wallet out of the safety zone because really, anyone could do it. All the previous holes, one earlier this week and the other last december, happened on "rooted" phones, meaning that the normal, non tech-savvy thief would have a hard time getting in. "Android actively protects against malicious programs that attempt to gain root access without the user's knowledge. Based on this report's findings we have made a change to the app to prevent deleted data from being recovered on rooted devices," a Google spokesperson told CNET back in December. Reassuring until The Smart Phone Champ came along and discovered a trick it could use on non-rooted phones. The blog explains:

Go into the application settings menu and clear the data for the Google Wallet app. After doing that your Google Wallet app will be reset and will prompt for you to set a new pin the next time you open it. The problem here is that since Google Wallet is tied to the device itself and not tied to your Google account, that once they set the new pin and log into the app, when they add the Google prepaid card it will add the card

that is tied to that device. In other words, they'd be able to add your card and have full access to your funds.

If someone got their hands on the phone, it would take about one to two minutes for that person to create a new PIN, which would allow authorization of payments. Just watch. Mom could do it.

"You'll notice it's going to have access to whatever funds were on your Google prepaid account," he explains in that video. Google has ensured that nobody can go into the Wallet when the phone sits idle, so this only works when a thief has the device in hand. Just like a wallet thief would have access to all the dollars within, a Google phone thief gets that cash. "That's a pretty big security hole there," he continues. Yes, just as big of a security hole as carrying around wads of money.

Google Loses Bid to Exclude E-Mail From Oracle Trial

Google Inc., fighting a patent lawsuit filed by Oracle Corp., lost its appeals court bid to keep secret an engineer's e-mail that says the Web search company should negotiate a license for Java technology.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit in Washington today denied Google's request to overturn a judge's order that the information could be presented to a jury when the case goes to trial. Tim Lindholm wrote the e-mail in August 2010, days before Oracle alleged in a lawsuit that Google's Android operating system had been designed using patented and copyrighted features of Oracle's Java programming language.

Lindholm's e-mail was related to an effort by the company and its lawyers to formulate a response to Oracle's allegations and is protected by attorney-client privilege, Mountain View, California-based Google argued. The Federal Circuit disagreed, saying that Lindholm's e-mail states "he was responding to a request from Google's management, not Google's attorneys."

"The e-mail's discussion is directed at a negotiation strategy as opposed" to a legal strategy, Circuit Judge Alan Lourie wrote for the three-judge panel. "The e-mail does not evidence any sort of infringement or invalidity analysis."

In the e-mail to Andrew Rubin, the executive in charge of Google's mobile division, Lindholm said he was asked by company co-founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin to "investigate what technical alternatives exist to Java for Android and Chrome."

"We've been over a bunch of these, and think they all suck," Lindholm wrote. "We conclude that we need to negotiate a license for Java under the terms we need."

Google said the e-mail was mistakenly disclosed to Oracle.

Oracle, based in Redwood City, California, has said it's seeking at least \$1 billion in damages. U.S. District Judge William Alsup in San Francisco has rejected earlier versions of how Oracle calculated the damages estimate.

The case is Oracle America Inc. v. Google Inc., 10-03561, U.S. District

Court, Northern District of California (San Francisco).

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